

## Pedagogical Practice for Integrating the Intercultural in Language Teaching and Learning

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*Languages education is increasingly emphasising the place of the development of intercultural abilities in the teaching and learning of languages, and such requirements are now common in curriculum documents around the world. This change in emphasis has posed some challenges for the ways in which language teachers work. For some teachers, language and culture have been seen as separate areas of teaching and learning and the focus on the intercultural is seen as a movement away from language. For others, however, language and culture are fundamentally integrated and the focus on the intercultural represents a way of refocusing language teaching and learning to reflect this integration. Such an integrated approach means that the intercultural can be included in the languages curriculum, without a movement away from a language focus. This paper will examine ways in which language curriculum and practice can be understood from an intercultural perspective focusing on the intercultural while maintaining language learning at the heart of the curriculum.*

The intercultural dimension has become an important one in language learning and much recent work in many countries has focused on this.<sup>1</sup> This work has begun a paradigm shift in the ways in which language education is understood, moving away from a code-based understanding of the nature of language to a view of language as culturally contexted meaning-making. When language education begins to focus on meaning making, issues of interculturality become primary in the ways in which language learning is constructed. Second language communication is intercultural communication. When people use their second language they are encoding ideas in a linguistic system located within a cultural context, one which will be interpreted as being located within that context. Language learners have to engage with culture as they communicate and to learn the cultural contexts which frame communication and interpretation.<sup>2</sup> This paper will explore the idea of intercultural pedagogy in language education, exemplified by a case study drawn from Japanese language teaching and learning.

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<sup>1</sup>For example, Bartolomé, 'L'educació intercultural'; Bolten, 'Interaktiv-interkulturelles Fremdsprachlernen'; Byram, *Teaching and Assessing*; Byram and Zarate, *Définitions, objectifs et évaluation*; Candau, 'Interculturalidade e educação escolar'; Cerezal, *Enseñanza y aprendizaje*; Kramsch, 'Bausteine zu einer Kulturpädagogik', *Context and Culture in Language Education* and 'The Cultural Component of Language Teaching'; Liddicoat, 'Static and Dynamic Views'; Terranova, *Pedagogia interculturale*; van Kalsbeek and Huizinga, 'Transcultureel taalonderwijs'; Zarate, *Enseigner une culture étrangère*.

<sup>2</sup>Liddicoat, 'Communicating within Cultures', 'Interaction, Social Structure', 'Static and Dynamic Views'.

### Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning: Some Basic Assumptions

The ultimate goal of language teaching and learning is to be able to communicate in another language. Communication is not, however, just a question of grammar and vocabulary, it is also a question of culture.<sup>3</sup> Every message a human being communicates through language is communicated in a cultural context. Cultures shape the ways language is structured and the ways in which language is used. A language learner who has learnt only the grammar and vocabulary of a language is, therefore, not well equipped to communicate in that language.

When people begin to communicate messages in another language, they not only begin to exploit language functions, they also begin to function within a cultural context. As such, learners require cultural knowledge as much as they require grammar and vocabulary. Quite often native speakers can be tolerant of problems of grammar or vocabulary, but cultural mismatch often creates significant problems for communication and for social relationships, largely because people are much less aware of their cultural rules for interaction than they are of other aspects of language.

Cultural knowledge is not something that learners can just pick up. In fact, cultural differences may often go unnoticed by learners until they actually create a problem.<sup>4</sup> If learners are going to develop their cultural knowledge about the target language group, they need to be helped to notice when their culture differs from that of others and they need to notice this before it creates problems. This then is where language teachers need to use explicit teaching to draw their students' attention to culture and the ways in which varying cultures work. Often culture has been considered to be some sort of fifth macro-skill,<sup>5</sup> which is introduced once the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing have been established. At its most extreme, this view considers culture as something that learners will pick up by themselves when they go to the foreign country. Quite often in language text books there is a separate section reserved for culture and often these 'cultural notes' sections focus on aspects of culture which are not closely linked to language itself, such as festivals or arts. These notes, while interesting, are not usually the elements of culture that learners typically experience difficulty with. In fact, text books often seem to ignore cultural information which might be very important for learners in interactions with native speakers.<sup>6</sup>

Because culture is integrated closely with language, quite simple language can often be bound up with quite complex culture.<sup>7</sup> This is the case, for example, with things like the different ways European languages use pronouns for 'you' or Japanese uses plain, neutral or honorific verb forms. In these cases, the formal grammar involved is not exceptionally complex, but without a good understanding of the culture in which the forms are used it is impossible to use the forms correctly. Explanations that one form is more polite than another are not really helpful, because often what is involved can be a different idea of politeness.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Crozet, 'Teaching Verbal Interaction'.

<sup>4</sup>Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco, 'Intercultural Competence'.

<sup>5</sup>For example, Damen, *Culture Learning*.

<sup>6</sup>Hanamura, 'Teaching Telephone Closings in Japanese'; Liddicoat, 'Everyday Speech as Culture'.

<sup>7</sup>Liddicoat, 'Everyday Speech as Culture'.

<sup>8</sup>Wierzbicka, 'Different Cultures'.

Because culture is fundamental to language, there is a need to start teaching culture at the very beginning of language teaching. Even very simple language such as greetings, meal time formulae or the choice of a pronoun is heavily culturally laden and this needs to be addressed when these aspects of language are taught. If teaching the culture is left until later, learners will have already created an understanding of context for the language they are learning – an understanding they will have to unlearn. Language is not learnt in a cultural vacuum which can be filled in later; rather, learners create their own cultural assumptions as they learn. An absence of input about culture does not leave a vacant cultural space. Rather, it fosters a cultural space which is filled by uninformed and unanalysed assumptions based on assumptions and understandings from the learners' first culture.

In developing an approach to language teaching which focuses on intercultural communication, consideration needs to be given to the sort of speaker it intends to create. In the past, language teaching has usually aimed at making the learner as much like a native speaker of the language as possible.<sup>9</sup> This is both an unrealistic goal, in that language teaching hardly ever achieves it, and an inappropriate one. It is inappropriate because it does not reflect the social and cultural reality of using a second language. When someone speaks in their second language, they do not abandon their own thoughts, feelings and values and assimilate themselves to the thoughts, feelings and values of their interlocutors;<sup>10</sup> instead they reach an accommodation between their own culture and personality and the new culture.

Instead of aiming for a native speaker norm, language teaching can more profitably aim for a bilingual norm: that is, developing a speaker who is comfortable and capable in an intercultural context. Bilingual speakers' needs are different from those of monolinguals.<sup>11</sup> Bilinguals need to navigate between the languages and cultures they know and they need to create identities for themselves which work in these contexts. In order to become competent bilinguals, learners need to know what native speakers mean when they adopt certain behaviours, but they do not have to reproduce these behaviours in the same way. This means teachers have to think about 'productive competence' and 'receptive competence' separately.<sup>12</sup> As receivers of language, second language users need to be able to understand what native speakers mean in native speaker-like ways. As producers of language, however, many second language users do not want to behave in native speaker-like ways, may not feel comfortable doing so, or may not need to do so.

To work most effectively, language learning needs to allow opportunities for learners to reflect on their own language and culture. Most learners have not had opportunities to learn about the ways in which their own culture works and how their own language reflects their culture. Without this knowledge it is difficult to come to terms with a different culture. The most important cultural learning that can come about in the language classroom is learning that cultures are relative, not absolute. Learning about another culture provides opportunities for comparison with one's own culture and for learning which go beyond the traditional aims of language instruction. In situations where language learning may be too limited for learners to develop high levels of

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<sup>9</sup>Kramsch, 'The Privilege of the Intercultural Speaker'.

<sup>10</sup>Byram and Zarate, *Définitions, objectifs et évaluation*.

<sup>11</sup>Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco, 'Intercultural Competence'; Kramsch, 'The Privilege of the Intercultural Speaker'.

<sup>12</sup>Kasper, 'Interlanguage Pragmatics'.

language proficiency, a deeper understanding of one's own culture and the ways in which cultures vary may be the most long-lasting outcome of language learning.<sup>13</sup>

It is true that it is impossible to teach everything about culture. Cultures are complex things and they vary from person to person, from group to group and over time. There is no way to transmit such a complex and dynamic thing in a classroom. What we can do in the classroom is help learners develop ways of finding out more about the culture they are learning by analysing their experiences and developing their awareness.

### **Towards a Pedagogy of Intercultural Language Learning**

An interculturally oriented approach to language teaching and learning has a constant concern for two key dimensions of language teaching practice. The first of these is that language, culture and learning are fundamentally integrated.<sup>14</sup> This means that in developing a pedagogy of intercultural teaching and learning it is necessary to recognise the classroom as a cultural context in which teachers' and learners' experiences and expectations are shaped by the linguistic and cultural backgrounds that each brings to the classroom. Each participant in the class enacts through language his/her understanding and assumptions about fundamental aspects of practice such as what constitutes learning, what constitutes knowledge and how knowledge is to be displayed or used. This means that an important starting point for developing an intercultural pedagogy is for teachers individually to recognise the cultural locatedness of the ways they think about teaching and learning. Such recognition allows teachers to come to understand the motivation and conceptual underpinnings for their own action as teachers and how they themselves mediate across cultural assumptions in their work.

The second important dimension of an intercultural language pedagogy is the recognition that there are always at least two languages at play at every moment: the target language and the first language(s) of the students.<sup>15</sup> Each language constructs the world in particular ways and carries embedded understandings of the nature of that world. This can happen even at the most basic levels of language, as the following extract from an interaction between an Australian student and a Japanese native-speaker teacher demonstrates.

Text: 信号は青になった。

S: Are traffic lights a different colour in Japan?

T: No. They're the same.

S: But it says here that the light turned *aoi*.

T: Yes. That's right. And then the cars go. What happens next?

This extract shows at a simple level the presence of multiple language systems at play in a single interaction – in this case leading to a problem in comprehension. The problem

<sup>13</sup>Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco, 'Intercultural Competence'.

<sup>14</sup>Byram and Feng, 'Teaching and Researching Intercultural Competence'; Byram and Zarate, *Définitions, objectifs et évaluation*; Kramsch, 'The Cultural Component of Language Teaching', 'Teaching Along the Cultural Faultline'; Liddicoat, et al., *Report on Intercultural Language Learning*.

<sup>15</sup>Kramsch, 'The Privilege of the Intercultural Speaker'.

here stems from a mapping of a Japanese lexical item *aoi* onto an English word *blue* and onto the conceptual system which underlies the English word – the conceptual boundaries of what can be termed *blue*. For an English speaker the conceptual field occupied by the word *blue* can never include the colour of a traffic light. This prompts the student's first question. The teacher's answer here confirms the real world similarity between traffic lights but does not explain the conceptual mismatch the student is experiencing. This leads to a further attempt to negotiate the problem in which the student uses textual evidence to restate the conceptual problem. Here, the student uses the word *aoi*, which for the Japanese speaker invokes a conceptual system which includes the colour of traffic lights as a possible member. The Japanese speaker responds according to the conceptual system associated with *aoi*, although the student's problem is based on the conceptual system associated with the word *blue*, which moreover is never actually brought to the surface in the interaction.

The cultural interrelationships in language exist not only on the lexical level as in the example above, but pervade the entire communicative repertoire of language. They influence perceptions of non-literal meanings of speech acts, judgments of whether or not a particular linguistic structure is polite in a particular context, whether a text is elegantly written or illogically structured, etc.<sup>16</sup> The multiple languages existing in the classroom therefore make possible multiple interpretations of any instance of language use, in any language. The recognition that multiple languages are always present in the language classroom is not simply a prerequisite for developing an intercultural pedagogy; rather an intercultural pedagogy is fundamentally based in the recognition of such diversity. It involves developing understandings of the way in which this recognition influences the process of communication within a language and culture and across languages and cultures.

Language education, especially communicative language teaching, has often attempted to suppress the fact of the multilingualism of the language classroom, by acting as if the language classroom were a monolingual target language environment and by attempting to exclude the learners' own language as much as possible. In such approaches to teaching, the students' existing language knowledge is seen as a problem for the acquisition of the new language which must be overcome through the proscription of that language. In reality, however, it is never possible for a multilingual person to suspend the relevance of his/her complete language knowledge in any interaction. For multilingual people their entire linguistic repertoire is always potentially available and always affects their perceptions of the events they encounter. The monolingualism of many language classrooms is at best a fiction and at worst a denial of the identities and cultural realities of both the teachers and the learners.

An intercultural pedagogy is one which engages actively with the interrelatedness of language culture and learning and with the multiple languages and cultures present in the classroom which shape learners and learning. This involves developing with students an understanding of their own situatedness in their own language and culture, and the recognition of the same in others.

Intercultural language learning involves developing with learners an understanding of their own language(s) and culture(s) in relation to an additional

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<sup>16</sup>Liddicoat, 'Communication as Culturally Contexted Practice'; Wierzbicka, 'Different Cultures'.

language and culture. It is a dialogue that allows for reaching a common ground for negotiation to take place, and where variable points of view are recognised, mediated, and accepted.

Learners engaged in intercultural language learning develop a reflective stance towards language and culture, both specifically as instances of first, second, and additional languages and cultures, and generally as understandings of the variable ways in which language and culture exist in the world.<sup>17</sup>

Fundamentally, through intercultural language learning, students engage with and learn to understand and interpret human communication and interaction in increasingly sophisticated ways. They do so both as participants in communication, and as observers, who notice, describe, analyse and interpret ideas, experiences and feelings shared when communicating with others. In doing so they engage with interpreting self and others' meanings, with each experience of participation and reflection leading to a greater awareness of self in relation to others. The ongoing exchange of meanings in interaction and reflecting both on the meanings exchanged and the process of interaction are an integral part of life in our world. As such, intercultural language learning is best understood not as something to be added to teaching and learning but rather something that is integral to the interactions that already and inevitably take place in the classroom and beyond.

Liddicoat et al. propose a set of principles which provide a starting point for developing intercultural language learning.<sup>18</sup> These principles (outlined in Table 1) amount to a constructivist theory of learning applied to the context of the intercultural as manifested through language. They are therefore starting points for an intercultural pedagogy, not an intercultural pedagogy itself. Each of these principles requires development into practice. This practice can be conceptualised as a series of four interrelated processes of noticing, comparing, reflecting and interacting (see Figure 1).

The process of noticing is fundamental to learning.<sup>19</sup> In intercultural language learning, it is important for learners to notice cultural similarities and differences as they are made evident through language, as this is a central element in intercultural learning beyond the classroom. When experiencing something new, learners need to examine the new information in their own terms and seek to understand what it is they are experiencing. Noticing, however, is not necessarily a naturally occurring activity for learners in the classroom. Rather, noticing is an activity that occurs in a framework of understandings which regulate what can and should be noticed. Teachers' questions are therefore important in helping students develop the sophistication of their noticing and to become independent noticers of lived experiences, language and culture. The most basic level of operations that students can perform on their experiences of language and culture is comparison, in which students identify similarities and differences. The process of comparison is multilayered: it needs to allow space for comparisons between the learner's background culture and the target culture but also between what the learner already knows about the target language and culture and the new input s/he is

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<sup>17</sup>Liddicoat, et al., *Report on Intercultural Language Learning*, 46.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>Schmidt, 'Consciousness, Learning and Interlanguage Pragmatics'.

TABLE 1. Principles for Developing Intercultural Language Learning.

1. Active construction	Learning involves purposeful, active engagement in interpreting and creating meaning in interaction with others, and continuously reflecting on one's self and others in communication and meaning-making in variable contexts. For students, it is more than a process of absorption of facts; it is continuously developing as thinking, feeling, changing intercultural beings.
2. Making connections	<p>Learning is developed firstly through social interactions, that is, <i>interpersonally</i> and then internally within the mind of the individual, that is, <i>intrapersonally</i>. In the interpersonal process previous knowledge is challenged and it is the challenge to initial conceptions that creates new insights through which students connect, re-organise, elaborate, extend their understanding. In this process constant connections are made between:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● language and culture and learning</li> <li>● existing conceptions and new understandings</li> <li>● language and thinking</li> <li>● first language and additional language(s)</li> <li>● previous experiences and new experiences.</li> </ul>
3. Interaction	Learning and communication are social and interactive; interacting and communicating interculturally means continuously developing one's own understanding of the relationship between one's own framework of language and culture and that of others. In interaction participants engage in a continuous dialogue in negotiating meaning across variable perspectives held by diverse participants, and continuously learn from and build upon the experience.
4. Reflection	Learning involves becoming aware of how we think, know and learn about language (first and additional), culture, knowing, understanding and their relationship as well as concepts such as diversity, identity, experiences and one's own intercultural thoughts and feelings.
5. Responsibility	Learning depends on learner's attitudes, dispositions and values, developed over time; specifically in communication it involves accepting responsibility for one's way of interacting with others within and across languages and for striving continuously to better understand self and others in the ongoing development of intercultural sensitivity.

noticing. Comparison of similarities and differences provides a resource for reflection, and reflection as a classroom process is a core element of developing interculturality.<sup>20</sup> Reflection involves several considerations. It is a process of interpretation of experience: this does not mean, however, that the learner is being

<sup>20</sup>Kohonen, 'Student Reflection in Portfolio Assessment'.



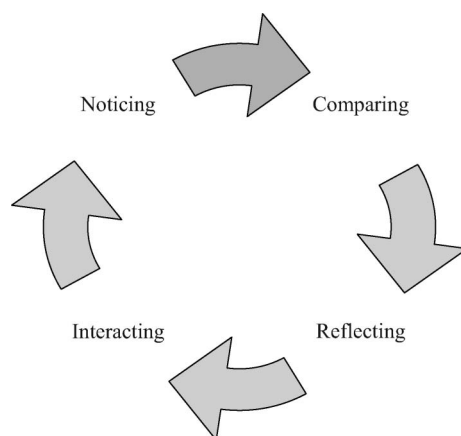


FIGURE 1. Interacting Processes of Intercultural Pedagogy.

required to draw ‘the right conclusion’ or simply to explore his/her feelings about what has been discovered, but rather that the learner makes personal sense of experiences. This involves the learner in reflecting on what one’s experience of linguistic and cultural diversity means for oneself: how one reacts to diversity, how one thinks about diversity, how one feels about diversity and how one will find ways of engaging constructively with diversity. Finally, interculturality is not a passive knowing of aspects of diversity but rather an active engagement with diversity. This means that intercultural learners need to be engaged in interacting on the basis of their learning and experiences of diversity in order to create personal meanings about their experiences, to communicate those meanings, to explore those meanings and to reshape them in response to others.

These processes do not in themselves ensure an intercultural pedagogy as they are simply process, not content. However, the activities are important to learning how to learn about language and culture. The processes are not linear in relationship but rather all may be co-present in any instance of teaching and learning. Moreover, they do not represent a linear process of learning by which one passes through each ‘stage’ to reach a final outcome. They are rather a set of processes through which the intercultural learner passes many times as s/he develops greater complexity of understanding.

### **Aspects of Classroom Practice**

The assumptions outlined in the previous section have strong implications for the ways in which language teaching happens in practice. In particular, intercultural language teaching and learning presupposes a movement from an emphasis on explaining and interpreting another culture for students to one in which students themselves develop an understanding of culture through a process of noticing, reflecting on and interpreting aspects of culture presented through language. The role of the teacher is therefore not to tell students about culture but to provide culturally rich language experiences and to guide students’ learning through their questioning practices. Such an approach is exemplified in the materials in Examples 1 to 3 below.



ちゅうがく ねんせい  
中学1年生

	月	火	水	木	金
1 時限目	理科	公民	国語	国語	柔道
2 時限目	英語	英語	書写	数学	理科
3 時限目	美術	数学	公民	国語	日本史
4 時限目	国語	理科	体育	公民	日本史
5 時限目	音楽	数学	理科	体育	英語
6 時限目	数学	英語	ホームルーム	英語	数学

EXAMPLE 1. School Life in Japan.

学校生活

わたし しょうがくせい  
私は小学生です。



とも がっこう い  
友だちと学校へ行きます。



きょうしつ  
教室です。



まいにち きょうしつ こうでい そうじ  
毎日、教室や校庭の掃除をします。



きょうしつ ひる た  
教室で昼ごはんを食べます。

EXAMPLE 2. School Life in Japan<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>21</sup>I wish to thank Kylie Farmer and her colleagues at Huntingdale Primary School for their assistance with these texts.

きゅうしよくこんだておもて  
給食献立表

2月			
月	3	ごはん	や なつとう くだもの 焼きそば・納豆・わかめスープ・果物
火	4	だいず 大豆ごはん	さけ しおや かぼちゃ じる くだもの 鮭の塩焼き・南瓜 サラダ・さつま汁・果物
水	5	パン	かぼちゃ くだもの チリコンカン・南瓜 サラダ・果物
木	6	むぎ 麦ごはん	にく なつとう くだもの 肉じゃが・納豆・みそ汁・果物
金	7	むぎ 麦ごはん	なつとう くだもの おでん・納豆・果物

EXAMPLE 3. School Life in Japan.

These three texts, drawn from a corpus of texts used with a Japanese primary school partial immersion program, provide a resource for learning about culture in self-directed ways. The texts are each authentic in the sense that each is an actual text written by Japanese people, about Japanese realities for a Japanese audience. They have been modified for use with language learners by adding *furigana* to assist with reading and by adding pictures to the texts to assist comprehension. Example 1 is a school timetable. Example 2 is a text written by Japanese students about their school. Example 3 is a school canteen menu which was accompanied by pictures of the dishes described. These texts are not substantially different from texts used in more traditional programs. What is different is the questioning associated with the texts. Such texts are typically used for reading comprehension and questions relate to locating information from the texts: that is, the texts are treated as a language sample and understanding is treated as decoding information encoded in the target language. The change in approach with these texts begins by considering the texts as encapsulations of culture expressed through language, and rather than limiting students' experiences of the texts to information decoding, the pedagogical focus moves students on to consider what each text represents about Japanese culture and society.

This is done through a series of tasks developed around the issue of schooling, designed to encourage exploration of cultural similarities and differences. Students began with Focus 1, in which they were asked to reflect on their own school situation. The questions provide opportunities to practise language abilities such as descriptions, present tense verbs and school vocabulary with reference to a familiar context. The tasks in this focus are designed to involve students in discussion, which provides for the

possibility of different perspectives emerging from students. The discussion was designed to be conducted in both Japanese and English, with English being drawn on to allow issues to emerge which were beyond the students' language proficiency. The intercultural aims of this task are to activate students' own knowledge and assumptions about schooling and to consider the variability which is found within their own culture and society. The final question is particularly important as it serves to underline that experiences of culture are only ever partial and that variability is an inherent feature of all cultural contexts.

### **Focus 1: My School**

In groups of three, students discuss the following questions:

- What is your normal day at school? What do you do? When do you do it?
- What is your school like? Describe the buildings and the grounds.
- Do you think your school and school day are like those of other schools in Australia? What might be similar and what might be different?

In Focus 2, the questions move from students' current knowledge of schooling to an experience, through language, of schooling in Japan. In the tasks in this focus, groups of students are given one of the selection of texts used in the unit of work (such as those in Examples 1 to 3 above).

### **Focus 2: Japanese Schools**

In groups of four, students read a text about Japanese schools and discuss the following questions:

- What do you notice about this school?
- How is it similar to your school?
- How is it different from your school?
- Do you think all Japanese schools are like this? What might be similar and what might be different?

Each text is treated as an instance of cultural information. The questions are designed to encourage students to move beyond comprehension and to begin to notice cultural similarities and differences and to make comparisons between their own cultural assumptions and the new information they are being presented with. Students are asked to construct their own understanding about Japanese schools from the text, rather than being given the information directly by the teacher, thereby opening up a process of intercultural exploration. Students' work on the basic questions needs to be scaffolded through interactions with the teacher in which questions lead students to notice elements presented through the text and to develop comparisons. The intercultural focus of the task is noticing culture through text and developing comparisons, both of

which engage students in processes of reflection. Again, the final question makes the idea of cultural variability relevant, with this task as a way of emphasising that any experience of a culture is always a partial representation.

The partial nature of experiences of culture is emphasised in Focus 3, in which students group the knowledge gained from reading diverse texts and enlarge their representation of the new culture. The students are again involved in a process of social interaction in which different elements of noticing and comparison are grouped.

### **Focus 3: Japanese Schools**

Students reassemble in groups of three so that each person has read a different text. Each student presents his/her text to the others. Students discuss the questions from Task 2 again:

- What do you notice about this school?
- How is it similar to your school?
- How is it different from your school?
- Do you think all Japanese schools are like this? What might be similar and what might be different?

In addition, students consider the following question:

- How has your view of Japanese schools changed after having looked at all the texts?

The total group of texts was designed so that some texts overlapped and provided different information on the same event. Focus 3 develops a more complex representation of the culture and involves a synthesising of information in which each text is recognised as a partial representation of culture from which a more complete understanding can be developed. It involves comparison not only with the background culture of the learner but also requires comparison of previously known information and new information in order to synthesise a representation. The development of more complex cultural representations from multiple experiences of culture is foregrounded by the final question which asks students to reflect on their experience of assembling a cultural representation and how they have moved from a more limited to a more complex view of Japanese schools.

The final focus moves back to the students' perspective. They are invited to reflect on their experience from a personalised dimension, constructed here as likes and dislikes.

### **Focus 4: Thinking about schools**

In groups, students discuss the following questions:

- What would you like about going to school in Japan? What wouldn't you like?
- What do you think a Japanese person might like about your school? What do you think they wouldn't like?

The power of this task lies in the requirement to decentre from one's own cultural perspective. The first question encourages students to reflect on their experience of Japan from their own cultural starting points. The second question requires the student to see his/her own culture from the perspective of another. The decentring here is developed from a personalised perspective which allows these young learners to approach a conceptually difficult task. The questions are designed to highlight multiple perspectives: the perspectives of different learners with different preferences as well as the perspectives of different cultural expectations and assumptions.

The four focuses provided in the discussion above are attempts to construct a pathway by which students are encouraged to move from their own culture-internal views of familiar experience of life towards an understanding of another way of constructing the same experience. The stimulus for movement is not the delivery of new information but rather a question-led process of exploration which engages learners directly through target language texts as cultural artefacts. The pathway is designed not so much around the idea of acquiring knowledge but rather around developing the capacities for intercultural exploration. The key features of the activities discussed above are:

1. involving students in a process of noticing, comparing, reflecting and interacting;
2. constructing the background culture of the learner and the target culture as equally valid representations of human life;
3. viewing instances of language use as experiences of culture and opportunities for culture learning;
4. focusing on the capabilities required for on-going learning about cultures through experiences of language; and
5. encouraging the inclusion of multiple perspectives.

### **Concluding Comments**

The language-teaching profession has consistently argued that languages education is important for developing intercultural understanding. However, when language teaching has focused only on learning the language code, students have few opportunities to develop such understanding. Moreover, when cultural input is limited to isolated snippets of information about the target language culture, this too provides little opportunity for deep cultural learning. Intercultural approaches to language teaching and learning take the development of cultural understanding and the ability to use cultural knowledge to facilitate communication as primary goals for language learning, along with the development of language competence and linguistic awareness. In an intercultural approach, learners are encouraged to notice, compare and reflect on language and culture, and to develop their understanding of their own culture as well as the culture of others. This paper has attempted to outline some of the main principles that teachers use to develop an intercultural approach in their classrooms to enhance their learners' experiences of language and culture.

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